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SUBJECT: BASHAR'S 11/9 SPEECH TO ARAB PARLIAMENTARIANS
EVOKES PAN-ARABISM, CONDEMNS ALLEGED 10/26 U.S. RAID

REF: A. DAMASCUS 677

[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 714

Classified By: Classified by A/DCM Tim Pounds for reasons 1.5 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Syrian President Asad delivered a November 9 keynote address to the Arab Transitional Parliament gathered in Damascus for a bi-annual meeting of legislators from Arab League states. True to Bashar's year-long efforts to make Damascus the capital of Arab culture and resistance, he recycled 1960's and 1970s pan-Arab rhetoric in a call for Arab unity against "outside" intervention, particularly the U.S. End Summary

[1](#)2. (C) Iraq: Bashar reiterated Syrian calls for an end to the U.S. "occupation" and a national reconciliation process "among the different affiliations." His speech drew polite applause for noting, "The recent American aggression on the Syrian soil indicates that the presence of American occupation troops constitutes a source of threat for the security of countries neighboring Iraq. It is a factor of regional instability and confirms that the security agreement aims to turn Iraq into a base for striking at the neighbors instead of being a support for them." In an effort to challenge U.S. arguments in favor of a continuing Coalition presence in Iraq, Asad added, "If withdrawal (of Coalition forces) creates chaos, what does your continued presence create? Is there anything worse than what we now see in any part of the world?"

[1](#)3. (C) Arab-Israeli peace process: Asad delivered a stream of bromides scoring Israel's disinterest in true peace and cavalier rejection of Arab peace initiatives, while he nonetheless defended Syria's participation in indirect talks with Israel on the Golan. Asad pledged not to compromise in the defense of Arab rights and criticized "the existence of an outgoing U.S. Administration which should have been concerned about peace. But it did not know anything about human civilizations other than the clang of swords..."

[1](#)4. (C) Lebanon: Perhaps reflecting the increased cooperation on border security and upcoming visits of Lebanese officials to Damascus, Bashar had positive words for Syria's evolving relationship with its western neighbor: "we express our satisfaction with the positive atmosphere that followed the Doha Conference, which set the main principles for national accord and created the right circumstances for achieving stability in Lebanon and foiling attempts by some to strike at its unity." His positive tone stood in marked

contrast to the confessions aired November 6 on Syrian TV by Fatah al-Islam members accused of launching the September 27 attack in Sayyid az-Zayneb (reftels). In particular, Asad chose not to repeat allegations by the confessors that Saad Hariri's al-Mustaqbal Party and Saudi Arabia had supported Fatah al-Islam.

15. (C) Comment: Bashar's anachronistic references to anti-colonialism and pan-Arab unity broke little new ground and found a skeptical audience fully aware of Syria's ongoing feud with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. His obligatory shots at the U.S. presence in Iraq, the SOFA, and the alleged 10/26 attack against innocent Syrians appeared to resonate more effectively. But as a few visiting parliamentarians commented to a media contact covering this event, Syria's willingness to engage indirectly on the Golan and Bashar's widely publicized note of congratulation to President-elect Obama somewhat undermine his credibility as bearer of the pan-Arab flame.
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